

BOSTON, MASS.
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE
MONITOR

E. 174,093

NOV 12 1985

State
of the
nations

Spies and superspies

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Washington

Those who, like the writer, have been following with fascination the emerging story of Col. Oleg Penkovsky can only wonder what repercussions have already occurred through the vast bureaucracy of the Soviet Union.

Experts in these matters estimate that the discovery of Colonel Penkovsky's defection must have set the whole Soviet spy apparatus back by many, many months, perhaps even years.

For example, Penkovsky's former masters had to assume that he had disclosed to British and American intelligence the names of every important existing Soviet secret agent. That would mean that from the Soviet point of view their entire apparatus for gathering information in the West had been compromised. All the old-timers would have to be recalled and replaced by entirely new and unknown men who would have to rebuild the Soviet spy system from the ground up.

Security blow

Certainly the Penkovsky affair goes a long way to even the score between Moscow and the Western capitals. The information obtained through Penkovsky is worth to the West today what the Soviets obtained from Fuchs and Pontecorvo and Burgess and Maclean in other times.

Back in 1955 when the cold war was still the dominant feature of the world and Moscow's secret police ruled absolutely every govern-

ment in Eastern Europe a man named Swiatlow defected from Poland. Swiatlow was one of the top men in the Polish secret police. Why he "came over" has never been disclosed publicly. He did. After Western intelligence teams had sucked him dry of useful information, careful thought was given to the use to be made of it.

Tito's 'crime'

The essential feature of his story was that the entire police apparatus in every East European Communist state was controlled directly and totally from Moscow. It was not just a matter of remote influence. It was a matter of a Russian secret police officer in charge of the secret police in Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria.

Only in Yugoslavia was this not true. This is the real reason for the 1948 "break." Tito's "crime" in Moscow's eyes was his refusal to let the Russians run his police apparatus.

Perhaps the most important "cloak and dagger" decision of the American Central Intelligence Agency was when it decided to play back Swiatlow's information to the Poles over such useful channels as Radio Free Europe. By this, and every other available vehicle, the Poles were told exactly who was running their police system from exactly what room in what building and which street.

The information was so meticulously accurate, that

it could not be challenged back in Warsaw. Many a man in the Polish Government was profoundly shocked to discover that Poland was in truth a "satellite." The shock wave disturbed not just ordinary Poles. It also shook many a Pole who believed in communism, but also in Poland's having its own national life.

The shock wave of the Swiatlow disclosures split the Communist Party of Poland. It separated and divided out the Russian stooges from the native Poles. It armed the Poles against the stooges. The old Moscow-trained clique was blown out of power. In the turmoil Gomulka, himself a victim of the Stalin era terror, came back to power. Moscow's grip on the Polish security apparatus was broken.

Solicit not command

It is not too much to say that the use made by the West of the Swiatlow case was the charge of dynamite in the political ice jam which unfroze Eastern Europe. It opened the way for evolution. There was a direct causal sequence from the Swiatlow defection to these days in which Moscow must solicit, because it can no longer command, the cooperation of Eastern European countries.

Both the Penkovsky and Swiatlow cases are lacking in some of the more lurid trimmings of a James Bond adventure. Yet each has massively affected the course of history.